

Educational Expansion, Family Interactions, and the Open Society

Bildungsexpansion, Familieninteraktionen und die offene Gesellschaft

Expansion du système de formation, interactions familiales et la société ouverte

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1 Educational expansion and its consequences in Switzerland

Against the backdrop of controversial debates on economic modernization, political developments, and Cold War-era social reforms, Swiss society has (like other Western societies) experienced a remarkable expansion in its educational system since the 1960s. This expansion has included increasing educational participation and educational opportunities, and a growing demand for general education, vocational training and academic skills (Breen et al. 2009, 2010; Hadjar and Becker 2009). Although educational expansion had a lower impact and was less dynamic in Switzerland than in some other countries (Buchmann et al. 2007; Buchmann and Charles 1993), longitudinal studies based on a cohort design demonstrate that Switzerland did catch up during the last decades with respect to educational enrollment, the acquisition of higher education, and the attainment of credentials (Zangger and Becker 2016; Hadjar and Berger 2010; Pfeffer 2008). Educational expansion over the generations led to an unprecedented upgrading of qualifications in the Swiss Population (Becker and Zangger 2013). Consequently, this process led to changes in the inequality of educational opportunities with respect to social origin, ethnic background, and gender (Becker and Zangger 2013; Jann and Combet 2012; Hadjar and Berger 2010; Pfeffer 2008; Buchmann et al. 2007).

In contrast with other countries, however, theoretical and empirical research on the extent to which these structural changes can be causally attributed to educational expansion in Switzerland is not very well developed. There are striking gaps in the research regarding the educational expansion's consequences for familial and demographic processes over time. Educational expansion is often asserted to lead to changes in various fields of society such that society moves towards a more open social contract, in which individual achievement (rather than social reproduction) is deemed vital for the good of future generations. One field of particular relevance in

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this context is partnership and family formation, which can be assumed to be strongly influenced by educational transformations. This special issue therefore taps into the consequences of educational expansion for partnership and family interaction and its contributions to the openness of the Swiss society. It also includes analyses of data from a few other European countries as points of comparison.

The ideal type of open society, according to Karl Popper, is one in which “many members strive to rise socially, and to take the places of other members.” In contrast, a closed society “resembles a herd or a tribe in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties – kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress” (Popper 2012, 179). The contributions of family interactions to the openness of society are many (Widmer 2010). In some societies, the market and the state come first in the provision of welfare, whereas in other societies, the family as an institution is considered the main solidarity group for individuals (Ganjour and Widmer 2016). When this is the case, social solidarity takes on a rather local quality, which reduces the social contract’s ability to deal with the increasing complexity of economic and cultural interdependences unfolding across the social spectrum in the course of modernization (Elias 2001). The consequences of such family-based collective solidarity in terms of the persistent inequalities between women and men have been stressed by previous research (Esping-Andersen 2009), but it also has consequences beyond gender inequality by leaving rich and poor, and natives and migrants, with strongly differing access to crucial resources. Another way in which family contributes to the openness or closeness of society relates to the suffusion of family ties with other interpersonal relationships, namely friendship (Allan 2008). In some societies, family members and friends are considered to belong to the same domain of close interpersonal relationships, whereas in others, sociability with kinship members, friends, and other members of personal networks are kept apart. In the latter case, the family is more weakly aligned with the general understanding of how relationships work in the present state of society.

Finally, the openness of society relates to the way in which family is formed at the time of marriage (Kalmijn 1998). Does marriage follow the lines of social reproduction, or does it contribute to a redistribution of social resources? In other words, how strongly, and in what ways, is a society affected by homogamy, or the marital association of people of similar social status or origin? The papers that follow will address this topic. The marriage market is a social institution with important consequences for the structure of society, as it creates opportunities for various social groups to open up and merge through the exchanges of partners and the constitution of families with mixed social heritages (Levi-Strauss 1969). A closed society is one in which marriage mostly happens within tight-knit social groups. In that case, marriage reinforces social inequalities created by the intergenerational transmission of resources (wealth but also cultural and social capital). Homogamy

increases the concentration of such resources among the future children born to couples at the upper end of the social stratum, and decreases the redistribution of such resources towards children of a lower social background. When children from one generation are raised for the most part by homogamous parents, the process of cultural transmission necessarily becomes heterogeneous across the social spectrum and entrenched in distinct class identities and class practices (Bernstein 2003). In other words, when homogamy is on the rise across marriage cohorts, yet another layer of social immobility – group closure and cultural divide – is imposed on the next generation of adults, therefore reducing the chances of societal openness in a Popperian sense.

2 The contributions of this special issue

Educational expansion may be expected to decrease homogamy by opening the doors of higher education to social groups barred from it. However, results from international research are mixed in this regard. It is therefore important to assess the effects of Switzerland's educational expansion on homogamy and other family interactions since the 1960s. Several papers of this special issue quantify the extent to which educational expansion is related to a decreasing, stable, or increasing rate of homogamous marriages in Switzerland. The paper by *Ravazzini, Kuhn and Suter* reports an increasing level of assortative mating with respect to education and wages across cohorts in Switzerland. The authors attribute this trend to low-qualified individuals. The comparative paper by *Falcon and Joye* finds that, in various European countries overall, there has been stability in educational homogamy across cohorts rather than a decline. This stability, however, conceals great differences with respect to labor market participation and family work arrangements within couples. Interestingly, couples in which both partners fully participate in the labor market show a higher level of homogamy than couples with more traditional family arrangements (i. e. couples in which the wife stays at home or works part-time and the husband is a full-time employee). *Falcon and Joye* conclude by suggesting that the increase in gender equality has created a restructuring of educational homogamy toward higher homogamy at the top. The paper by *Wise and Zangger* confirms that educational homogamy has been stable across birth cohorts in Switzerland. According to their analysis, educational homogamy has had only a marginal impact on earnings-based income inequality between couples, which may be due in part to the endogenous decision-making of couples concerning working time. The concentration of wealth implied by homogamous marriage may thus have been weaker than expected. *Potarca and Bernardi's* paper extends the inquiry of homogamy to mixed couples between migrants and the native-born. According to the status-caste exchange theory, intermarriages involve transactions in which the more highly-educated im-

migrant partners trade status for the ethnic advantage of less highly-educated native partners. Interestingly, however, according to the results of this paper, marriage has not operated as an instrument of integration between migrants and non-migrants of unequal educational status in Switzerland.

Three papers address the relations existing between educational expansion and three family practices other than marriage: remaining single, non-marital cohabitation, and divorce. *Becker and Jann's* paper shows that the inclination toward homogamous partnerships is most pronounced in less highly-educated groups, but that the differences between educational groups have become weaker in recent decades. According to their findings, educational expansion has been associated with the exclusion of a significant share of women (but not of men) from the marriage market. Likewise, the contribution by *Konietzka and Kreyenfeld*, which is based on the German microcensus, estimates a link between non-marital cohabitation and educational expansion in East and West Germany. Their investigation shows that more highly-educated women in West Germany had a higher probability of being in a nonmarital partnership rather than of being married. With an increase in the share of non-marital births, however, this association has reversed in West Germany. In this respect, there is a socio-structural convergence of West Germany towards East Germany. Finally, the paper by *Kessler* assesses whether educational expansion has led to an increasing rate of divorce in Switzerland since the 1960s. The results show that the educational gradient in partnership breakup is positive and highest for women (and, to a lesser extent, for men) among older cohorts, but is statistically non-significant for the most recent cohort. This result is important because, if heterogamous marriages were more likely to break up, a higher rate of heterogamous marriage, both ethnically and socially, would not translate into a more open society (Kalmijn 1998).

Taking all the papers together, readers will be struck by the strength of traditional family practices regarding marriage and partnership formation in contemporary Switzerland. The results of this special issue show that, despite the remarkable expansion of education and the extent of educational upgrading over the last fifty years, not much has changed in homogamy's effects in Switzerland and other European countries. The special issue shows that, like other societies, Swiss society has not achieved greater openness in the family realm as a result of an increasing exposure to higher education. We are left wondering what structural changes may achieve this end, or, alternatively, what might have happened to family structures had the educational expansion not taken place. From a methodological point of view, however, it must also be emphasized that some of the consequences of educational expansion could not be revealed for the Swiss case due to the lack of longitudinal data across long historical periods. Possibly, a longer time-horizon might be needed to uncover the societal changes brought about by the educational expansion more fully. Part of this development may still be ahead of us, as the ongoing expansion of

tertiary education can be assumed to have a significant impact on the development of partnership markets, the formation and stability of families, and consequently on demographic changes and social inequality in Switzerland. Future sociological research will reveal the degree to which Swiss society is affected by these changes.

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